

EXCERPTS  
FROM  
A PATRIARCHAL STATEMENT  
ON  
THE GIRDLE OF OUR  
LADY VIRGIN MARY  
IN  
THE CHURCH OF HOMS - SYRIA

Translated From Arabic  
by  
Farid H. Bismarji

1967



ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

Ex Libris

Beth Aardutho Library

The Malphono Abrohom Nuro Collection

D-2004

EXCERPTS  
FROM  
A PATRIARCHAL STATEMENT  
ON  
THE GIRDLE OF OUR  
LADY VIRGIN MARY  
IN  
THE CHURCH OF HOMS - SYRIA

Translated From Arabic  
by  
Farid H. Bismarji

1967



## P R E F A C E

After praising our Lord, Jesus Christ, we say :

The Divine providence has so willed as to unveil the girdle of our Lady the holy Virgin Mary in Her church in Homs on the twentieth day of July 1953 A.D., after we came to know accidentally from a hand written letter concerning it. We knew previously that this church was also known as « The church of the girdle » or « The church of the Lady of the girdle » as will be described later on in detail. Multitudes of our Syrian believers and people from different Christain denominations and of all classes in Homs and all over Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries, came to enjoy the sight of this sacred relic, and seek its blessings with Christain desire and piety. They were lead by some of our eminent bishops, those of the Greak Orthodox, priests, monks and nuns.





OUR LADY THE VIRGIN  
THE MEDIATOR OF THE GIRDLE'S CHURCH-HOMS





Some wrote from far away lands inquiring about the authenticity of the news and the genuineness of the relic. This necessitated the issue of this statement divided into a few chapters suiting the subject, in order to enlighten the believers and clarify the facts to the desirers, by God's help and good guidance.

Homs, December 1st. 1953 A.D.

---

## Chapter One

### **OUR LADY THE VIRGIN MARY'S STATUS IN CHRISTENDOM**

It's an actual fact that our Lady the holy Virgin Mary, the Bearer of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnated God, has a lofty position in Christendom higher than that of the angels, prophets, apostles, martyrs and doctors of the Church, because God has chosen, purified, sanctified and preferred her to all women of earth. She is the diadem of the virgins and the crown of the Christians. The genuine historians and narrators have registered the different graces and miracles that the believers had won through

her. Millions of the believers honour her with sweetest songs and seek refuge in her acceptable intercession.

Our Syrian Church opens her daily worship by glorifying the Almighty God. After that She uses special invocations in which She praises our Lady the Virgin, and seeks her mediation, in the night, morning, and evening prayers, except the most of the lent days. Besides, She recites in her festivals,\* prose invocations and chants wonderful hymns in which She describes

---

\* Jan 15 th. Her remembrance for the blessing of crops.

Mar. 25 th Her Annunciation feast

May. 15 th Her remembrance for the blessing of spike.

June. 15 th The remembrance of the first church built in her name.

Aug. 15 th. The feast of her assumption.

Sep. 8 th. The feast of her birthday.

Nov. 21 st. The remembrance of her entering the temple.

Dec. 26 th The feast of her felicitation in the birthday of Jesus.

These feasts and remembrances are still considered in our Church which has overlooked two other remembrances : Her girdle day in Aug. 30 th and the day she was conceived in Dec. 9 th.



THE SACRED GIRDLE IN THE FONT  
WHEN DISCOVERED



her high virtues and everlasting merits, in a way that captivates the minds and delights the ears.

May God accept her mediation for the world, Amen.

---

## Chapter Two

# **THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY**

The famous Christian historians had agreed upon that our Lady Mary the Virgin is of Juda's tribe and the descendant of King David. She was born in 14 B.C. and she was her pious parent's, Yovagim and Hane, the only daughter. When she was three years old, her parents took her to the temple of God as a vowed to Him and then they died.

The priests and pious women brought her up. They taught her the worship, the virtuous deeds, the Hebrew language, the Old Testament, spinning wool, and weaving linen and silk until she was fourteen. Then she was espoused to a veracious man called Joseph the son of Jacob, who was a relative of her.



The chief of angels, Gebreal announced to her the descent of the Holy Ghost on her and the birth of Jesus the Redeemer of the world by her. She was pregnant and gave birth to Him while she was virgin in a heavenly miracle which astonished the world. She brought Him up in the house of His foster father Joseph, where He lived. She glanced His first miracle, heard Him preaching His gospel and saw His crucifixion and death in flesh. She believed in His resurrection and witnessed along with the apostles His ascension to heaven and the descending of the Divine Spirit on the day of Pentecost: She lived in the house of St. John the apostle to whom our Lord Christ intrusted her when He was crucified. He took care of her and she persisted on worship and meditation in the heavenly mysteries until she died. The holy apostles conducted the funeral service with a great pomp and her virtuous body was buried in Jessemany Village outside of Jerusalem. Afterwards God carried her to His heavenly paradise. This was around 56 A.D. in the sounder novals, after she had lived most probably 70 years.

## Chapter Three

### **DISCOVERY OF THE GIRDLE OF OUR LADY VIRGIN MARY**

In mid April 1953, while scrutinizing some manuscripts \* We noticed a Garshunian book containing stories and speeches. It appeared to be bound with many papers piled up over each other. Orientals since 300 years ago used to bind some of their manuscripts in this way or with thick wood, then wrap it with leather or thick cloth because of scarcity of cardboard.

When we opened the book cover, we noticed that it was composed of forty six letters in Garshunian and Arabic concerning the diocese of Homs and environs written a hundred odd years ago. One of them was Garshunian 28 cm. long, 20 cm. wide written in 1852 by the notables of the archdiocese of Syria to the notables of the

---

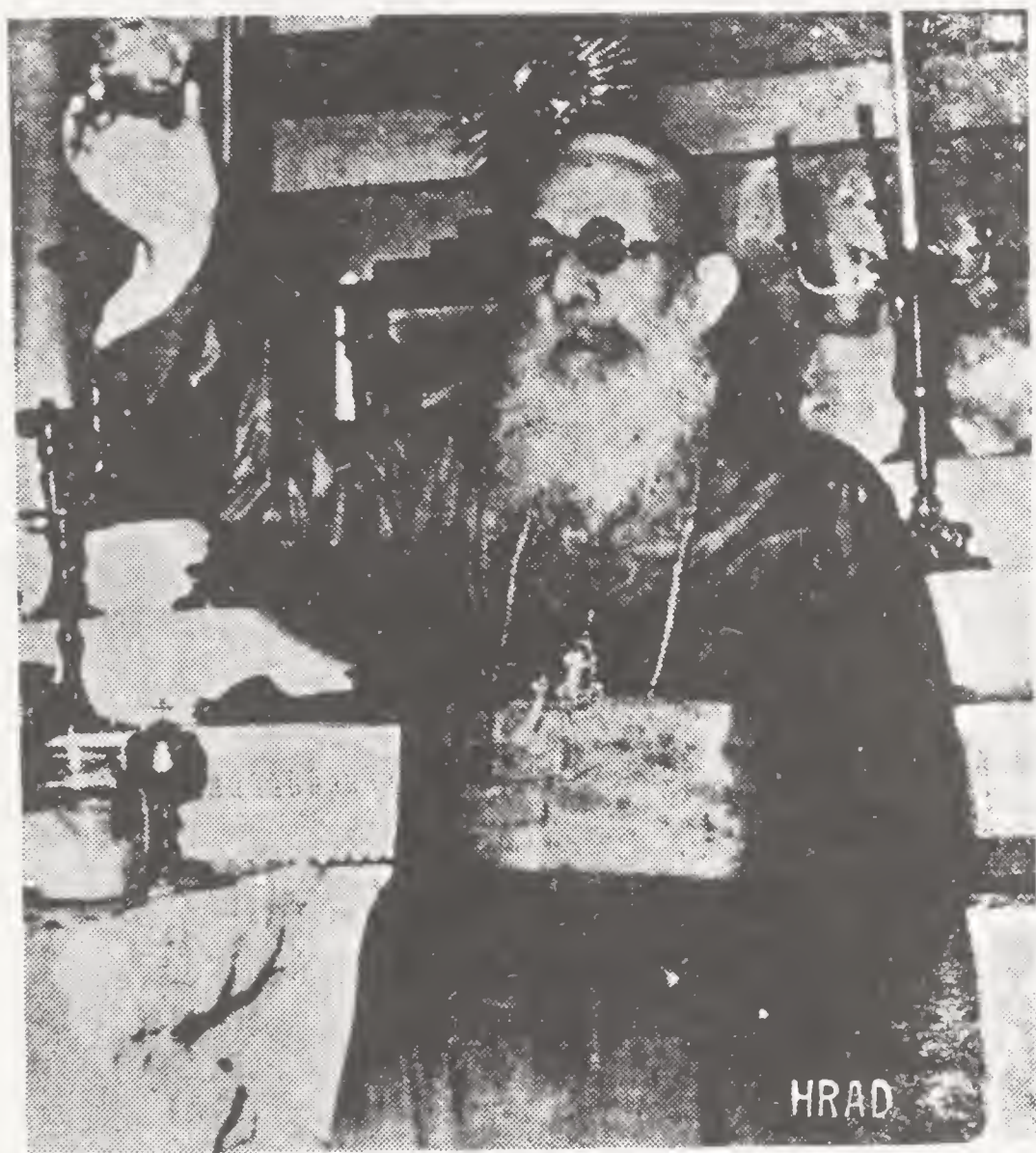
\* These manuscripts and other letters were gathered by the late priest, Father Youssef Askar of Homs who died in 1916 and were presented to the patriarchal library.

city of Mardin (Turkey) close to Za'faran Monastery, the Patriarchal See, implying the conditions of their archdiocese. They included that while wrecking their church called in the name of the Virgin the Lady of the girdle in Homs for purpose of enlarging and renewing it due to its oldness, smalness and its wooden ceiling, by the order of His Eminence the archbishop Peter Mousally, they found the girdle of our Lady the Virgin put in a vessel in the middle of the holy table in the altar. They were comprised with happiness and blessed by it.

According to this information, on the 20 th. of July 1953 A.D. we opened the holy table where we found a stone inscription 46 cm. long, 44 cm. wide, 2 cm. thick written in a nice Garshunian handwriting was the following :

« In the year 59, this holy church was built in the days of the preacher Mala'a who is called also Elija ». Then mentioned the date of renewing the church in 1852 A.D. in the days of the





PRESENTING THE GIRDLE TO THE MULTITUDES



archbishop Julius Peter-and the cities and villages that donated for the structure expenses.

We found under it an old font covered with a thick old round copper sheet and inside it the vessel. So we called His Lordship Alexandros the Greek Orthodox bishop of Homs and in his presence we opened the vessel which broke due to its oldness and the holy girdle appeared wrapped on itself and the signs of oldness appearing on it. We found also a thin metal pipe in the upper part of the vessel containing a hollow bone that seemed to embody a piece of parchment or thick paper which we left as it was. We gathered the pieces of the vessel and preserved them. His Lordship witnessed this fact and attested to it. In no time this news spread in the city, and a crowd from all Christian denominations infiltrated to receive blessings from the holy girdle.

## Chapter Four

### THE NAME OF THE LADY OF THE GIRDLE CHURCH

There is no doubt that the girdle which was intrusted in our Lady's church in Homs from very far generations, had bestowed on this church the name of « The church of the girdle » or « The church of the Lady of the girdle ». This was registered in its liturgical manuscripts and traditionally uttered up today by the believers.

Many of these books were lost or scattered due to the vicissitudes of time. It is inevitable to mention here what have remained of them preserved in this church and ascending to the beginning of the seventeen hundred.

— A Syriac gospel copied by deacon Yacob el-Hakim in 1602 A.D. mentioning in its end :

« In 1716 the bishop of Raha arrived in the girdle church and consecrated three deacons ».





THE HOLY GIRDLE IN THE FONT  
AFTER OPENING THE CONSECRATION TABLE



And in its beginning, « Deacon Barsom, the son of Khoury Yaghmour of the city of Homs, reviewed this book in the girdle church ». This Khoury Yoghmour was alive in 1716 A.D.

— A book of the prayers of resurrection copied by the Monk Georgis Wenky in 1608 mentioned : « We Peter, the archbishop of Syria repaired ( fastened ) this book in June 16, 1855 A.D. while we were in the city of Homs in the church of the Virgin the Lady of the girdle ».

— A Syriac and Garshunian book of Requiem of Men, Women, and Children, copied by the priest Moses the son of Ken, and endowed by Khoury Yohanna Mansour the native of Homs to the church of the Lady of the girdle in Homs in June 27, 2021 the Greek era (1701 A.D.).

— A book of clergy Requiem endowed in 1762 A.D. by the Monk Abdullah the son of the priest John Shidiak the native of Aleppo, one of the monks of St. Moses the Abyssinian monastery in Nabk to the church of St. Mary the Virgin in Homs, that is the church of the girdle.

— A book of ordination mentioned :

The Maphirian Basilius Bichara ( the archbishop of the East ) ordained the deacon Nu'matallah to the church of the girdle in Homs city in May 15, 2102 Greek era ( 1791 A.D. ).

— A Garshunian gospel copied by the bishop Ibrahim Yazigy of Sadad to the church of the Lady of the girdle in Homs in 1769 A.D.

— A Garshunian copy of the history of Mar Michael the Great in the church of St. Theodorus at Sadad, copied by the priest Ibrahim in 1764 A.D. mentioned : in 1852 A.D., the archbishop Peter got an edict from Istanbul and sent it for the reconstruction of the church of the girdle, and in 1855 A.D. His Eminence Peter, the archbishop of Syria returned from Istanbul.





THE FONT AND THE COPPER SHEET WHICH  
COVERED THE GIRDLE  
BELOW IS THE STONE INSCRIPTION



## Chapter Five

### THE SLAB FOUND IN HOMS CHURCH

When the Syrian people of Homs found the girdle of our Lady the Virgin in the consecration table in Homs church, and they greatly rejoiced and received blessings from it, they did not open its vessel, but returned it to the table in the new altar in the same condition, and put over it a big slab after engraving on it in Garshunian the date of the renewal of the church in 1852 A.D: in the days of Mar Julius Peter the archbishop of this Archdiocese and the contributors.\* They mentioned in the beginning the date of the construction of the church in the year 59 in the days of Mala'a Elija, the preacher. We therefore, say : there is no connection between the slab and the girdle because the aim of this slab was

---

\* He was then in Istanbul for obtaining an edict from the Sultan in the favour of the reconstruction of this church and for the benefit of the endowments. Only in 1855 A.D. he returned back to his Archdiocese. In 1872 A.D. he was installed as a Patriarch. In 1894 A.D. he expired.

to show the date of the renewal of the church. As we assert the old tradition which indicates that the churches that were built in the name of the Virgin were some of the oldest, we notice that the church of the Lady of the girdle is of this category. It was erected a small and simple church as a cellar under the ground because of the violence of paganism on christianity in the first three centuries, and some of our pious forefathers consigned in it the valuable girdle of St. Mary as a precious treasure to the believers whether before 394 A.D. in which the remains of St. Thomas the apostle — who possessed the girdle — were moved from India to Raha, or shortly after that.\*\* This is not unbelievable if you know that the ancient christian narrators agreed upon that the head of St. John the Baptist and some of his remains were moved to

---

\*\* In the Syriac history of Raha it is mentioned that in Aug. 22, 705 Greek era they brought the coffin of St. Thomas the apostle to his large church in the days of Mar Kora « the bishop of Raha ». (The Orient Biblio of Assimaany, Volume I, page 399 ).





THE BONE THAT WAS FOUND WITH THE GIRDL  
AND THE BRASS SHIELD AROUND



the churches of Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo within the fourth century \*\*\*

The thorough investigator whose aim is the positive evidence, has decided that anybody who tries to date the construction of the churches in the first three centuries — except in rare cases — will be surely failing.

It is known to us from the historical point of view that the church in question was in existence in 478 A.D. This is clearly mentioned in the story of St. Basos and companions the persians who were martyred in May 11. 388 that when Father David, one of the monks of Mar Basos monastery arrived in Homs on his way to Jerusalem around that year, he stopped

---

\*\*\* In our library there is a Syriac story of sixteen pages speaks of the head of St. John the Baptist, how it was in the city of Herodes, and moved to Homs where it appeared and was consigned in a church built to this Saint in 453 A.D. (copied from an Istrangelic manuscript of Za'faran Monastery written in 1180 A.D.)

in this church while going and returning back.\*

The preacher Mala'a or Eilija, is one of the

---

- \* The summary of the story is that the aforementioned Father, had long stayed in Homs due to the troubles in those days. He stayed in the Lady's church which was in the possession of a faithful, wealthy, generous Syrian leader called Peter the son of Joseph. He became acquainted with this monk and invited him to his house. When their friendship strengthened Peter told him what filled his heart with sorrow due to an illness in his sterile wife who had ill-vision. So the monk prayed for the intercession of Martyr Basos some of whose holy relics he carried. So she recovered her eyesight. When he left for Jerusalem. he consigned the blessed relic in the church of Homs, in compliance with the request of the leader who made a vow that he would offer half of his wealth if God blessed him with a son through the intercession of the martyr. God blessed him with a pair of twins, a boy and a girl, whom the monk baptized when he returned back and named them Basos and Sousan. So Peter erected a great monastery between Homs and Apamia named it after the martyr, and offered to it vast endowments. Its reputation spread so as to hold once six thousand and three hundred monks, to some eminent of whom the Patriarch and Saint Severius wrote well-known letters (We refer you to our article, published in our patriarchal magazine in Jerusalem-second year 1934 pp. 99 - 102,



seventy Preachers. The Patriarch Michael the Great mentioned him in two places in his history, saying in one of them according to the bishop Yacob the son of Slaibi, that he preached christianity in Homs, Balback, Rastan and Hamat, and died in Sheezar.

---

## Chapter Six

### **THE REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ANTIQUITIES DIRECTORATE IN DAMASCUS ON THE GIRDLE**

For further investigation, and as a result to our expressed desire, the directorate of antiquities in Damascus sent us a committee consisted of Dr. Joseph saba', curator of the Damascus museum, and Mr. Ra'if el-Hafez, the technical assistant. After examining the holy girdle and all related matters thoroughly, the committee presented her report on August 16, 1953. Its summary, after the preface on how the discovery

---

based on volume IV of the stories of Martyrs and Saints in Syriac, pp. 499 - 504, taken from a copy in Paris' public library No. 276 ).

took place, and the record of the inscription on the slab which consists of nine lines, is the following :

« A font of volcanic stone in the shape of a simple capital of a column, 12 cm. high, the length of its upper surface side being 24 cm. and the length of the side of its base 29 cm. In the middle of the side of its upper surface, there is a copper disc 15 cm. in diameter, decorated with diacritical circles. It covers a semi-oval pit whose upper diameter is 16 cm. It contains a can, cylindrical in shape and made of a metal so rusty that it does not exist any more. But the rust has retained the original shape of the can which is probably made of silver combined with another metal. When His Beatitude the Patriarch tried to take it out from the font, it broke in his hand to small pieces, and the base of the can remained attached to the font pit, so he took it out broken to many pieces and found within the can a girdle wrapped in pieces of thread and cloth ».

The girdle is 74 cm. long, 5 cm. wide, 3 cm. thick, light beige in colour, and made of woolen



ANTIQUITIES COMMITTEE  
EXAMINING THE HOLY GIRDLE





longitudinal yarn in the inside,\* with stripes of silk woven on it, and embroidered on the outside with streaks of golden threads. It is worn out on the edges with oxide appearing on some parts, and has been affected by the rusty metal can.

Besides the can there hung from the top a brass cylinder 6.5 cm. long. When opened, there appeared inside a piece of bone from a human arm, the same length as the cylinder. Inside the bone, there appeared what looked like a rolled parchment whose extraction needs special and fine treatment.

Then the second report from which we quote the following :

« The font and the brass disc go back to the Byzantine era ; and may be the can containing the girdle was laid in the font and covered with the disc when the church was renewed in 1852 A.D. and the can has left its rusty marks in the bottom of the font ».

---

\* We are inclined to believe that it is made of silk and linen threads.

« It seems that the afore-mentioned can had been in the altar of the previous church for a long time may go back to the period of its erection. This is obvious from the severely oxidized can resulting surely from its being in a damp soil for such a long time, and the wearing off of the girdle during the time it was inside the can, and the state of the bone and the parchment within. A thorough study of these matters after technical treatment has been applied, will no doubt clarify our early comments. »

A comment was made on the margin :

« Many texts of the New Testament indicate that girdles were used by the early Christians. Studies of textiles and clothing up to the Roman era show that orientals used to wear girdles of various kinds ; an example of this is a basalt torso of a woman (in that era) wearing a girdle similar to the afore-mentioned one ( museum of Soeida No. 303 ) ».



THE GIRDLE SPREAD OUT  
TO DEMONSTRATE ITS MEASUREMENTS





## EPILOGUE

We, Ignatius Aphraim I, by the Grace of God, the Patriarch of the Apostolic See of Antioch and All the East, having referred to all the historic and archeologist references relating to our Lady the Virgin Mary and her girdle, confirm from the evidence offered us, the genuineness of her holy girdle which was preserved in the Lady's church in Homs, and invite our faithful children to pay homage to it and seek its blessings. May God bestow our Lady's intercession on them. Amen.

December, 30 th. 1953 A.D.





